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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ONE QUARTER MILLION DOLLARS TO BE RELEASED TO VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT BY U.S. GOVERNMENT

United States Attorney David M. Nissman, United States Marshal Conrad Hoover and Virgin Islands Police Commissioner Elton Lewis announced today that equitable sharing funds totaling approximately One Quarter of a Million Dollars will soon be released to the Virgin Islands Police Department as part of the U.S. Department of Justice's Asset Forfeiture Program.

U.S. Attorney Nissman stated that the Asset-Forfeiture Program allows for the seizure and forfeiture of money and property derived from or used in certain types of criminal activity, such as drug distribution, money laundering, and fraud. When a local law enforcement agency such as VIPD participates in the investigation resulting in the seizure of forfeitable property, it may be entitled to an equitable share of the forfeited property or the proceeds from the sale of the property if it agrees to use the property or its proceeds for law enforcement purposes.

The U.S. Department of Justice, Asset-Forfeiture and Money Laundering Section, had withheld approximately Two Hundred Eighty Thousand Dollars (\$280,000.00) from VIPD, because it had been unable to account for money received from the asset-forfeiture program between 1991 and 1997. Because VIPD was unable to show that asset forfeiture money received during that time frame had been used for law enforcement purposes, it had been disqualified from receiving asset forfeiture money from the U.S. Department of Justice. There was no wrongdoing implicit in VIPD's inability to account for the use of the asset forfeiture money. It was simply a problem of accounting.

On October 24, 2003, the U.S. Department of Justice decided to release the majority of the previously withheld money to VIPD because of demonstrated law enforcement needs in the Virgin Islands. The Justice Department decided to withhold only \$30,000 of the money from VIPD, and release the remaining \$250,000. At the same time, though, the Department of Justice recommended that some of the released money be used by VIPD to contract with a Certified Public Accountant to insure that all asset-forfeiture money received in the future would be used in a proper fashion.

Since VIPD is now eligible for equitable sharing, we expect to see movement on the asset forfeiture front. Already there have been many more seizures of property and the Federal Government expects to distribute Hundreds of Thousands of Dollars in the next year to VIPD as a result of the Asset Forfeiture Program. The immediate beneficiary of the decision allowing VIPD to receive this money is law enforcement in the Virgin Islands, but the ultimate beneficiary is the public.